



Come together

DEMOCRACY MATTERS IN ART MEDIATION

Master of Arts thesis for the
Program of Visual Culture
and Contemporary Art

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Abstract

Art mediation is a discipline in the field of Visual Culture, which is, nowadays, part of most of museums' public programs. In general lines, it consists of strategies dedicated for audiences to interact with the life of museums as spaces of social and cultural encounters. "Come together – Democracy matters in art mediation" is a study on the multiple relations played out in art mediation – relations of power, justice, and transformations in the lives of publics, museums, and art mediators. These relations are examined: 1) in the framework of canonical theories in the field of arts, politics, economy and culture; 2) through assessment of interviews with workers from the field of art mediation combined with exposition of specialists' knowledge in the discipline of cultural mediation; 3) through the production of a script for a short fiction movie about a mediated visit to a museum that doesn't go quite like the expected. These three methods are employed to cast light over the contradictory problems of power in museums as democratic institutions - their practices are able to produce challenges towards hegemonic power, however, at the same time, these efforts are ineffective in enhancing justice and freedom in the lives of people who are involved with art mediation.

Keywords: art mediation, institutional critique, democracy, justice, emancipation

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COME TOGETHER *Democracy matters in art mediation*

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Assessment # 1

Amongst the many activities found in museums, guided visits are widely adopted as a form of art mediation in which publics and museums' representatives come together to create a temporary community that develops fruitful collaboration. It is an exercise on democratization of knowledge, cultural policies and spaces, as well as a tool of empowerment for the actors involved: publics are empowered because they're able to construct a reasoned social order in this mediated context; museums, as democratic institutions, are empowered by exploring the different forms of publics' reasoning.

Notable for their openness to dialogues and ability to instruct people, guided visits generate diverse forms of participation, reproduction of paradigms, collective constructions of meanings, occupations of exhibition spaces, and challenges towards hegemonic societal discourses displayed in exhibitions. Particularly since the educational turn

in the 1990's, researchers and practitioners in the field of arts and culture have approached art mediation as a democratic strategy to assess the ongoing struggles with power structures as well as to build relationships with more justice between publics and institutions. When thinking about the role of institutions and their influence over people's lives, Amartya Sen argues in his book *The idea of justice* (2009), that institutions can develop ways through which people could live more autonomously and with more social, cultural, economic and political equality:

“If we are trying to wrestle with injustices in the world in which we live, we also have to think about how institutions should be set up here and now, to advance justice through enhancing the liberties and freedoms and well-being of people who live today and will be gone tomorrow.” (Sen, 2009, p.81)

Now, from the perspective of each individuals' minds and performance as social actors, Jacques Rancière has developed the idea of emancipation - the individual capacity of actively engaging with art objects, analyzing, interpreting and relating them to one's personal archives of

knowledge in order to build meanings. He affirms, in *The Emancipated Spectator*: “The spectator also acts. She observes, selects, compares, interprets. She composes her own poem with the elements of the poem before her” (Rancière, 2009, p.13).

Thus, to what extent is art mediation a platform for reducing inequalities, improving justice and developing emancipation processes?

Throughout the study, it was found that mediation unfold discourses that affirm, reproduce, deconstruct and transform specific ideas in individual minds of those who get in touch with mediated art. It also helps in actualizing the deep-rooted orders of human desires in democracy and their forms of exchange manifested through culture, art, museums and the many disciplines enacted in it.

Since the conceptual art boom in the 1960's and its politically engaged agenda, cultural institutions have had to increase the number of public-oriented strategies in an attempt to fulfill the social demand for democratization of culture and

openness for public participation. Thus, departing from these radical and marginalized beginnings until the more recent insertions in the core programs of mainstream institutions like museums, galleries and biennials, the expanding interest in the discipline of art mediation demonstrates how the responsibilities of cultural institutions have changed, and with that, also the assigned role of publics of art has been transformed.

On the one hand, cultural institutions have implemented art mediation as tool for educational purposes, with instructive affirmations and reproductions of hegemonic norms. On the other hand, they have opened the context of art exhibitions to processes of emancipation and democratization through actualization of hegemonic discourses and institutional power. Hence, the democratic nature of mediated strategies in cultural institutions is able, at the same time, to perpetuate hegemonic discourses while balancing the negative effects of hegemonic power in society, which is found to be:

“Deeply dependent on the operation of the power of a multiplicity of institutions that check and balance the force and possible domination that might otherwise be exercised by one institution” (Sen, 2009, p.81)

Institutional power is intrinsically connected to state power, governmental bureaucracies, and economic agenda, among other regulatory stances that determine the way museums function, what they show, when, how, why, and for whom they show it. Departing from Foucault’s idea of *apparatus*, and specially from Agamben’s study in his text *What is an apparatus?*, institutional power (in this case, the power of museums) derives from discourses, laws, economic interests, as well as philosophical, moral, and philanthropic propositions. If a museum houses all of these forces, the exercise of mediation in museums can “manipulate relation of forces... either so as to develop them in a particular direction, or to block them, stabilize them, and to utilize them.” (Agamben, 2009, p.2)

Then, mediation is an exercise of power *for* people, *with* people, *over* people. All at once, it could be an exercise of authoritarianism, affirmation of hegemonic power, reproduction of norms and control over museum visitors, as well as emancipation, criticism, deconstruction, transformation and other forms of democratic engagement. All of these can happen in one single mediated visit to a museum, therefore making it a complex and contradictory practice – one that exercises tight control over publics while suggesting processes of liberation – a push and pull of freeing while violating freedom.

With intent of becoming more aware of this situation and understanding its potentialities and restraints, this study is a rehearsal on democracy in the intersections of institutional power, art mediation and public emancipation through a few questions: What is mediation and its relation to institutional agenda? What do art mediators have to say about mediation? What do

their accounts tell about mediation as emancipatory exercise and labor in the job market?

Therefore, one part of the present research focuses on canonical theories, while a second part focuses on interviews that were held with mediators in art museums. Because their interests are directly involved with the issues of mediated art, their reasoning shed light over the evaluation of mediation as cultural praxis and labor.

Throughout hours of interviews with mediation workers from different exhibition spaces, one thought was found to be common ground for all of them when thinking of mediation's agency: ranging from institutional instrument to emancipatory procedure, mediation was considered to be, first of all, a platform for *coming together*. According to the mediators, in this act of coming together lies the force of mediation – it generates a web of possibilities for the actors involved while setting up a basis for actions that might bring about all sorts of outcomes predicted (or unpredicted) for mediation in museums.

Overall, art mediations (and specially guided visits) were found to be complex trans-disciplinary practices due to their contradictory engagement with justice, emancipation and hegemonic power. Cultural mediations are exercises of power and also a problematic labor within post-capitalism. These findings were examined through readings of canonical theorists, data collection and creative work, which correspond, respectively, to three different parts of this study: 1) Theoretical framework, 2) Interviews with mediators 3) a Script for a short movie. This work is not a manual of art mediation techniques or theories, and yet, both theory and practice of art mediation will appear under the analysis that looks at art mediation through different channels of investigation.

Theoretical framework

1.

Mediation can be many things. It is an opaque, flexible, negotiable concept. Its agency is inscribed in a thread of historical-social-political-economical processes that crosses many discourses, types of knowledge, institutions, practices, appropriations, etc. When narrowing the meaning down to cultural mediation or specific disciplines like mediated visits to museums (in the case of this study), mediation still remains an unsettling multiplicity of fragments. On the one hand, this contributes to a loss of specificity of the term – which, in common sense, means something like *in the middle of things*. On the other hand, this study understands that mediation's multiplicity operates within what Mary Louise Pratt calls the *contact zones*. When referring to museums and exhibition spaces, Pratt approached them as zones “where cultures meet and clash opening up contexts for interpretations and production of different cultural meanings”. (Pratt, 1991, p.2) In this scenario, art mediation might be a strategy for instructive,

reproductive, critical and transformative agencies – a set of interactions and participations as well as a practice for exchanges of ideas that might push the boundaries of institutional and economic oriented expectations.

Art mediation and its dynamics of public engagement have signalized some of the critical challenges of society, such as the exercise of power in democracy. Through practices of participation and activism, museums are thought to constitute what Mary-Louse Pratt refers to as *safe houses*:

“social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings, temporary protection from legacies of oppression.”
(Pratt, 1991, p.6)

Nevertheless, art mediation remains regulated and limited by institutions that have succeed in exercising consensual power, as Gramsci develops in his *Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci, 1971), convincing its community participants that their interests are the same as those of the institution. While it is true that museums can be

places of community, integration, and innovation, it doesn't mean that they are open to external agencies that could effectively change the order of institutional interests (which are mostly economic based and will be addressed later through the concept of apparatus). It is noticeable, especially through their policies, that museums have approached mediation as service work, where the institution's good intentions would meet a public that is thought to be in need of improvement. Assuming that art publics are beneficiaries implicitly puts them under a position of weakness that hinders their agency.

There is a paternalistic presumption that museums owe something to society, thus, in order to fulfill that demand, exhibition visitors should be spoon fed with information and care. However, when thinking of mediation as a channel for more just relations between emancipated individuals, it is possible to claim mediation to be more than simply a filler for the gaps between museums and socially unprivileged publics. Cultural mediation has not

proved to be a sort of revolutionary discipline with power to strongly diverge from hegemonic discourses, but it might be claimed as a discipline that balances power structures with emancipatory agencies and more equality for people:

“Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection.” (Rancière, 2009, 13)

The dynamics of power played out in museums have many nuances that are related, but not limited to, geopolitical situations, economic outcomes, personal motivations, among many other specificities. This study focuses on general issues of the power relations and justice between publics, museums as democratic institutions, mediators as labor force and mediation as emancipatory practice.

2.

In a more traditional perspective, art mediation is understood as a tool for transmission of cultural heritage – usually from the perspective of privileged minorities – to a public that is increasingly broader and unrecognizable. According to Carmen Mörsch, since the growth of conceptual art in the 1960's, but most recognizably after the educational turn in the 1990's, cultural institutions have worked within the demand for what she calls a *culture for everyone*. As follows, the decision-makers in museums have shown increasing interest in art mediation as an institutional practice for public education. In the words of Mörsch:

“On the one hand, this boost is both cause and effect of an autonomous discourse generated by intense inquiry into activist and academic fields of agency and knowledge. On the other, this growing appreciation is tied to a visible trend toward neo-liberal appropriation of the creativity concept and thus the educational effects.” (Mörsch, 2007, p.16)

It is important to understand a few things about mediation: it is mostly, but not always

educational; its institutional and economic interests are not always clear; the work of mediation and its professionals are usually precarious and associated with service work, and the conceptions of public are superficial. Finally, by *public* it is important to note that even when this public is more specific, it is still homogenized into a certain *type* through “processes of subjectification” (Agamben, 2009, p.11) as a form of controlling the mediative process. Thus, the so-called transformative power of art mediation means, invariably, the transformation of a public by art and hardly ever the transformation of artistic institutions by a public.

In theory, art mediation could establish divergent dialogues with museum’s exhibitions, to deconstruct them and open up processes of collective investigations and agency, aiming at transformations on a broad scale, not only individual but also in the structural life of the museum as an institution. Nevertheless, these deconstructive and transformative types of

mediation are rare. As Mörsche has stated in her introduction to the workbook *Time for Cultural Mediation*, what art mediation has done is to incorporate the idea of deconstructive and transformative education into reproductive discourses that strengthen hegemonic power within culture and its institutions. Acknowledging the ongoing actualization of hegemonic power, would there be any cultural institutions willing and ready to become stages for more radical criticism and deep transformations in power relations? Furthermore, which people/publics would be effectively committed to participating in these processes?

Institutions are social conventions, which rely on social relations to support their status: individually and collectively, people not only assimilate a certain model of social order, but their so-called democratic participation in these institutions actually justifies and solidifies the existence of institutions. In this way, allowing publics to navigate museums through critical

mediations doesn't mean that the institution is under any risk of transforming (or even sharing) its power and position in society. In fact, an institution's role of dominance is reassured with the presence of mediated publics, because they happen to establish the museum as a democratically engaged institution helping a public that is apparently in need of something – knowledge, space, and agency, among other things.

Referencing Foucault's description of the Panopticon and power dynamics in modern institutions, the effect of institutional relations can be thought of as an *ingenious cage*, which is used for disciplinary purposes: “to induce a state of conscious and permanent visibility (of the individuals) that assures the automatic functioning of power.” (Foucault, 1979, p.205) Likewise, the multiple dynamics upholding museums (art mediation included) would allow the creation and maintenance of power relations, because of the regulatory relations of the stances involved in it – public, mediators, institution, and others. In this

context, art exhibitions might be thought of as spaces where people can act upon social institutions, when, actually, being related to an institution (regardless from the nature of this relation - of considered passiveness or activity) only tend to reinforce disciplinary power exercised in it.

3.

Contrary to the common belief that museums are places of universal values where society comes together with its different classes, genders, ethnics and regions, museums are institutions that comply with the nature of economy. According to the International Council of Museums, a museum is:

“a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM, 2007).

However, mostly any flux of creativity that is given or shared by people has its logic based on the capital they hold, and it wouldn't be different with the work of museums and art mediation. To some extent, that is why more participation-oriented practices in museums have increased lately. Due to a pressure to produce more democratic programs, art mediation has become a “justification of funding, because of its association

with marketing and quantitative audience increase, as well as with broad-audience programming” (Mörsch, 2007, p.13). Museums have incorporated mediation as part of the symbolic capital that enhances corporate interests.

The use of art mediation as marketing tool not only contributes to a loss of its power as transformative and emancipatory agency, but also establishes a process of instrumental control over creativity and culture. A type of control that is profit-oriented, in which “there can be either two consequences – success or failure” (Foucault, 2004, p.16). But why has the economy of art education grown and become so important for capitalism and global markets?

- It has potential for flexible growth, since it relies mostly on creativity;
- Positive impact over production and consumption of media;

- Incorporation of political, religious, informative, educational and many other discourses within its products;
- A supposed connection between culture and the development of a better society – inclusion of marginal positions, human development;

In practice, institutional agenda complies with economic interests, and so art mediation in museums has been one of the many dynamics that are embedded in the network of what Foucault, and later, Giorgio Agamben have studied – an *apparatus* in society: “anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings.”(Agamben, 2009. P.14) He explains that the apparatuses are formed through acts of sacrifice - acts that displace things from their common use to a separate sphere – and what motivates this separation is the purely human

desire for happiness. When contemporary institutions like museums orient their governance through economic goals, the result is a replication of the institution as it is, which sacrifices possible processes of enhanced justice and/or emancipation, namely, the formation of human gestures, thoughts and desires.

Yet, due to the very fact that museums are places where things are categorized and separated from their common use, that means they become fertile grounds for counter-active practice, or as Agamben writes: “counter-apparatus that restores to common use what sacrifice had separated and divided” (Agamben, 2009, p.19). Some of these practices *seem to be* manifested through mediation of “autoethnography, transculturation, critique, collaboration, bilingualism, parody, denunciation, and imaginary dialogue” (Pratt, 1991, p.5).

Divided between the urgency of transformative practices in the art field and the constraints of a museum workplace, art mediation

often has to balance between “consistent” critical discourses while adapting to marketing logics of funding. Even though much of museums’ educational discourses rest on public participation and public visibility, in practice, museums haven’t been able to afford a decentralization of power - the people who constitute the public are not effectively engaged in the life of the institution. Rare are the participatory practices that result in mutual agreements between institutions and publics, referring to what is collected and how it is exhibited, for example. And even when it happens, it is because *the institution* granted such power of decision to others, and not because *the public* did conquer it. These dynamics of supposed political negotiation “may even act as the perfect camouflage for undeclared political power.” (Easterling, 2014, p.72)

Thus, even though counter-apparatus practices can be connected to processes of emancipation and equality, they still remain

inscribed in, and sustained by, the very same apparatus they try to break free from.

What remains is “the triumph of oikonomia (economy), of a pure activity of government that aims at nothing other than its own replication.” (Agamben, 2009, p.22) Underneath the guise of post-capitalist practices of education, criticism, transformation and emancipation, the development of socially engaged practices has been advertised as platform for democratization, equality and accessibility. But ultimately, such endeavors are strategies to optimize corporate interests. As Keller Easterling (2014, p.68) writes: “power says something different from what it is doing.”

Even though art mediation may point at divergent directions of social life, the apparatus in which it operates and the force behind its own practice is conducted by the same governmental machine that controls culture and information, finances, natural resources, industries, and all sorts of important economies. When thinking of how to

challenge this dual role of institutions and behavior, Amartya Sen (2009, p.46) acknowledges that:

“There may remain contrary positions that simultaneously survive and which cannot be subjected to some radical surgery that reduces them all into one tidy box of complete and well-fitted demands.”

As such, the apparatus has auto-replicative power because there is no possible political position outside the dominant governmental machine driven by financial frameworks, and that is one of the troubling questions permeating creative disciplines, art mediation included. Every attempt to counter-act within the apparatus seems to be normalized by its own capability of action when the emancipatory-driven solidarities have survived and been nourished by the very dominant imperialistic ways of creating diverse forms of exploitation.

4.

In a moment of broader global access to Internet, critical positions towards society and politics have been developed, tackling, among other things, the role of institutions and its relation with hegemonic orders of power.

“It has not been, to be sure, an irresistible force, but it has persistently challenged the unscrutinized belief that authoritarianism is an immovable object in most parts of the world.” (Sen, 2009, p. 323)

This non-conformism is manifested through diverse socio-cultural movements in which situations of "local need" (the target of educational activities) are addressed within the politicization of periphery sectors associated with the emergency of open and interdependent creative processes. As fast as these critical movements grow, institutions have systematically recuperated resistance strategies and transformed them in a continuation of hegemonic/colonizing projects.

In its more radical conceptions, the democratic quality of mediation makes it a possible

strategy to be followed in “our everyday hand-to-hand struggle with apparatuses” (Agamben 2009, p.16) from inside their very hegemonic structures. Since hegemonic power is consensual, that is, established through socially accepted conventions, it allows itself to be debated, criticized and negotiated in society.

Thus, mediation can be worked as confrontation with hegemonic orders while happening inside institutions of dominance such as museums. All the while, this exemplifies so well the auto-restorative capacity of apparatuses – they are open and willing to receive critical agencies, but only to the extent that this criticism only legitimizes institutions by re-negotiating the same hegemonic orders, thus actualizing apparatuses’ own functioning.

"Apparatuses aim to create - through a series of practices, discourses, and bodies of knowledge - docile, yet free, bodies that assume their identity and their 'freedom' as subjects in the very process of their de-subjectification." (Agamben, 1991, p.19)

In other words, even when pushing the boundaries of power relations - trying to work on a foot of more equality between museums, funders, mediators and publics - mediation is rooted in the paternalistic view of those who have more power of decision-making over those who are socially excluded by the exercise of this power relation. Rare are the projects in which mediators and publics actively collaborate to its construction and development, rather than being consumers of a regulated experience offered by the project. Yet, the persistence in developing strategies of so-called democratic engagement in cultural institutions signalizes how institutions are wishing to form alliances and partnerships with outsiders that contribute to institutional functioning.

Increasing funding for mediation as participatory practice, still largely identified as a branch of art education in museums, represent an investment in what the European year of Creativity celebrated in 2009 as a contribution to economic prosperity as well as to social and individual well

being.

Arts Education equips learners with these skills, enabling them to express themselves, critically evaluate the world around them, and actively engage in the various aspects of human existence. Arts Education is also a means of enabling nations to develop the human resources necessary to tap their valuable cultural capital. Drawing on these resources and capital is essential if countries wish to develop strong and sustainable cultural (creative) industries and enterprises.

(In: <http://www.create2009.europa.eu/>)

Nevertheless, the interviewees in this research expressed that, in practice, the everyday agenda of museums is regulated in a way that that mediated exhibitions and other mediative practices consists of fast and mostly superficial moments, failing mediation's participatory character.

In an anxious attempt to accomplish funding demands, cultural institutions end up working against mediation's possibly emancipatory and transformative forces. Although mediation can be understood as an expanded territory within museums, it remains to be seen how its increasing

implementation as part of an agenda of institutional change could produce shifts in dominating standards of culture making.

Assessment #2

The second part of this study focuses on identifying the relations of power, the struggles for more just relations in museums, and the developments of emancipations that can be brought about in the work of cultural mediation. Inasmuch art mediators are the actors who are closely involved with mediation's implementation, their position as implementers is found relevant to examine the various effects of mediation. Furthermore, their reasoning signalize, to a certain extent, different points of entry to think about mediation, which will be juxtaposed with those commonly known opinions of decision-makers in the field – curators, artists, directors, producers and theorists.

“There is no chance of resting the matter in the ‘safe’ hands of purely institutional virtuosity. The working of democratic institutions, like that of all other institutions, depends on the activities of human agents in utilizing opportunities for reasonable realization.” (Sen, 2009, p 354)

Over many hours of interviews with museum mediators, it was possible to enter the multilayered interconnectedness of individual, collective and social dimensions interplayed in museums through a channel that hasn't been thoroughly assessed yet, that is, the personal accounts of the people who actually mediate exhibitions. The initial intention was to ask them how things were going and whether they could be improved in order to find more just social, economic, political and cultural circumstances for participants of art mediation and all of those affected by it.

This platform for conversations triggered reflections that resonate with the theoretical research presented in the first part of this study, as they exemplify the developments and problems with practical work experiences. To name some of the problematic issues that arose from the interviews: highly unbalanced power relations between museums, workers, and publics; lack of autonomy and responsibility for mediators as

creative agents; superficial formation of mediators; limited work resources, situations of risk and violence.

Moreover, all of the interviews signaled that mediation is an exercise well suited for critical discourses, but there remains a troubling desire to *incorporate* the criticality generated by such criticism. While none of the interviewees mentioned any groundbreaking, radical moment of transformation in mediation, what the majority of them stated as the most empowering thing about mediation is that it is a situation where people come together in that specific time and space of mediation. They claimed that, as a result of having this contact with different people, their attention (and maybe of some participants, too) had shifted to new perspectives on issues such as class struggles, political views and gender issues.

Thus, the coming together of mediation is understood as an action by which participants can partially (re) create things together. Rare are the moments where they can effectively interfere in the making and exhibiting of art. However, to some extent, they do interfere in the mediative process

because it is somewhat spontaneous, open to responses and changes during its course of action. When they come together in mediation, publics and mediators act and react, passively absorb and actively construct meanings, re-think and deconstruct ideas given by exhibitions. They also occupy the exhibition space in a different style. In the words of Henri Lefebvre, “the space of the museum is created by the relations enacted within it, embodied within it, as is the case with any other social space in civil society.” (Lefebvre, 1991, p.353) Thus, in these moments of coming together, relating to different people and thinking together, a force of creativity is forged. On the one hand, it is constrained by the apparatus – institutional agenda, regulations; but on the other hand, it creates a temporary shape and community in the museum.

Throughout the conversations with mediators, there was a tendency to talk about general facts and matters of taste, resuming complex topics through good vs. bad opinions. Because everyone wanted to have a saying and interview time was limited to up to two hours per

meeting, most issues were not thoroughly developed. In order to address every topic of concern more precisely, other methods would have to come into play, and this is to be developed as continuation of this present study.

The interviews started with a questioning on mediator's experiences with art mediation, and, from that point on there was minimum interference in their conversations, in order to allow them to react to each other's ideas. This opened up processes of identification, mutual understanding, agreements and disagreements, confessions. Most of the mediators expressed interest for the opportunity to talk about their work, expose their challenges, disappointments, and simply take some time to think together about what they were doing.

Interviews

5.

A total of ten groups of museum mediators were interviewed in the city of Curitiba, Brazil. The interviews took approximately two hours each and were set in the museums listed below:

Museu Oscar Niemeyer – April 2016;

Museu de Artes da UFPR – April 2016;

Solar do Barão – December 2016;

Memorial de Curitiba – December 2016;

Museu Metropolitano de Arte – December 2016;

Museu Alfredo Andersen – December 2016;

Centro de Criatividade – December 2016;

Museu Paranaense – May 2017,

Museu Oscar Niemeyer – December 2017.

Museu de Arte Indígena – January 2018

Group sizes ranged from 3 to 28 people. Three mediators were interviewed individually, because they were the only ones working in that particular place. In total, 65 mediators were interviewed. Initially, it was intended that the audio records of these interviews would be reproduced in exhibition spaces. Later on, it was agreed with the

coordinators of the Educational Departments of the museums that the records could be kept with me only for academic purposes and not reproduced elsewhere. Mediators mentioned that their criticism and opinions might be understood as problematic by higher hierarchical stances in the museums, thus jeopardizing their conditions as workers. This signalizes the difficulty in bringing up critiques to institutions within their own spaces. Museums are open to critique only to the extent that their set of policies are untouched by dissident positions. Since the job market in the cultural field is so precarious and work positions are not abundant, museum workers preferred to contribute with their accounts as long as they remained anonymous, thus protected from possible backlashes. Also, because most of the interviews were held in groups of mediators, a sort of collective speech was developed, in which the opinions, positions, and stories were told in the name of the group, ultimately, in the name of the institution where they worked.

Fifty-eight of the mediators were undergraduate students working as interns. They were students of Visual Arts, Music, Design, Architecture, History, Philosophy, Geography, Tourism and Social Studies. Four mediators were MA students in Visual Arts, History and Philosophy. Three of them had already completed their Masters degrees, one in Fine Arts, one in History and the other in Social Studies. The latter held permanent positions as mediation coordinators in their workplaces.

It is important to note that all of the mediators interviewed worked under the coordination of *Educational Programs* in their respective museums and the absolute majority of their work consists of guided visits for students from around 6 to 18 years old, in which mediators walk visitors around exhibitions and talk to them. Other practices comprise: workshops, public art guided tours, debates, guest lessons at schools, and other events that are not so frequent in their agenda.

These museums were different from one another, ranging from small to medium and large museums, private or public owned institutions. Some presented contemporary art, others modern, classic, private collections, and ethnographic material, among other artistic works and cultural objects. The interviews done in this study showed that, despite the differences between museums, they present similar strategies for art mediation as well as similar work conditions, institutional goals and challenges. As far as exhibition content is concerned, even though it is such a decisive element in the formation of art mediation's discourses, it was not a priority topic for this research. Specific exhibitions and works of art eventually came into discussion during the interviews and they provided contextualization for the mediators' stories. Yet, the research focused on assessing these stories in terms of mediation's methods, modes of operation, outcomes, thus contributing to a reflection about the general status

of art mediation rather than the status of particular exhibitions.

6.

The interviews were meant to produce dialogues about the work of mediation and its implications *through the perspective of art mediators*, aiming at a counter balance in the hegemonic arrangement in which cultural mediation is worked out. According to Amartya Sen, “the reading of behavioral norms and regularities becomes important for advancing the cause of justice”. Thus, the stories of mediators allow the identification of attitudes, conventions and ethics that give shape to mediative processes.

To start the conversation, an initial question was asked and after that, answers and commentaries led to reactions and reflections. The questions were extracted (some of them loosely adapted) from “What kind of art mediator are you?” a questionnaire presented in the 2012 version of Manifesta Workbook:

- 1) What are your most remarkable experiences working as mediator?

- 2) To what extent do visitors determine the content and dynamics of the visit?
- 3) How much of participation is involved in your mediations?
- 4) What kind of participation do you expect from visitors? What do they effectively realize?

The responses to these inquiries generated psychological satisfaction of individual self-identification. They also helped building bridges to understand localized actions and situations of cultural mediation in terms of macro contexts: cultural, social, economic, political, etc. These deliberations signalized conversions to a possible cure - socially conscious action or liberation from a "comfort zone" or paradigms.

During the conversations, interviewees had a chance to say their thoughts, reply to someone else, make remarks and tell their stories, which reinforced the possibility of freedom to voice one's opinion and be equal to others. As the conversations flowed, additional questions incited

details about particular *comments that I, within some parameters, considered valuable for this study* – that is, recognitions of power relations and the processes of emancipation and justice in museums. In order to grasp such advancements, “the assessment of development cannot be divorced from the lives that people can lead and the real freedom that they enjoy” (Sen, 2009), hence the importance of listening to the mediator’s accounts.

It has proven to be a problematic approach because it reproduces the same paternalistic relation that museums have towards visitors. In this case, it is the class of mediators that is in need of being assessed because it is marginalized. Then again, the controlled freedom given by this protective role still offered benefits in terms of re-thinking social, political, economic and cultural sets of knowledge, as well as recognizing a multiplicity of human identities.

Around 8 hours of conversations were recorded. However, only the things I’ve selected have a presence and a voice in this study. Because

the research deals with delicate and intricate motions of social and individual lives – desires, thoughts and actions – the methodology of interviews was open to reactions, adaptations and uncertainties. Having conducted these interviews as a collection of manifestations with the least amount of intervention, mostly following the direction of participant's own thought processes and reactions, it contributed to what I'm considering as, on the one hand, something positive: the recognition of a powerful point of entry to think mediation – the before mentioned power of *coming together*. And on the other hand, this method of interviewing proved to be negative in a sense that the personal accounts faded into too general lines and repetitive patterns of responses.

When decisions had to be made, the editing process was based on identifying moments within the stories when *some thing* produced a lasting impression, and this impression unfolded into reflections, re-arranging of desires, recognition of power relations, regulations, and modes of action.

Thus, it is important to acknowledge that even though the comments exposed here are personal stories of mediators, they remain restrained by the framework in which they were triggered and the limitations of this study – to explore the understandings of mediators and how their labor affected their own lives, as well as the lives of other people and the institutions where they work.

7.

The theoretical foundation chosen to build up conversations with mediators and to later examine their accounts is taken from Carmen Mörsche's *At a Crossroad of Four Discourses* (2007), in which she writes about different types of discourses that can be used in mediation. This is not an exhaustive or definite list of mediative guidelines, but it works as a reference that will be used here to assess how mediated visits are organized, implemented, developed and the expected outcomes of its realization. Although specific mediative strategies might target one of these discourses more than the others, it is not rare that all of these types can be interplayed in one single mediated exercise:

1) Affirmative

“The function of effective outward communication of the museum's mission in keeping with ICOM standards – collection, research, care, exhibition, and promotion of cultural heritage. Here, art is understood as a specialized domain, which is the concern of a chiefly expert public. Practices most often associated with this function are lectures and other related

events and media, such as film programs, docent-led tours, and exhibition catalogues.“

2) Reproductive

“The function of educating the public of tomorrow and, in the case of individuals who do not come of their own accord, of finding ways to introduce them to art. Practices related to this discourse are, for example, workshops for school groups, as well as teacher, children, and family programs or services for people with special needs, in addition to events that draw large audiences.”

3) Deconstructive

“Practices related to this discourse are, for example, exhibition interventions, programs aimed at groups identified as excluded from or discriminated against by the institutions, and guided tours, as long as they intend to criticize the authorized nature of institutions, to relativize and to render it visible as one voice amongst many others.”

4) Transformative

“Expanding the exhibiting institution and to politically constitute it as an agent of societal change. Exhibition spaces and museums are understood as modifiable organizations, whereby the imperative is less about introducing certain public

segments to these than about introducing the institutions—due to their long isolation and self-referential deficits—to the surrounding world.”

Mediators repeatedly expressed that mediation enables reflection, actualization of points of view, and recognition of problems, paradigms, and their repercussions in social life. It was said during an interview: *“a group of visitors in a museum space means, firstly, a group of people with backgrounds, experiences, interests, and stories that can be appreciated and used in favor of development processes”*. Thus, mediated exhibitions present opportunities to build localized relations of identification, trust, oppositions, and common references.

While subordinate peoples do not usually control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to various extents what gets absorbed into their own and what it gets used for. (Pratt, 1991, p.2)

It is also an opportunity to communally navigate through diverse cultural, social, economic, political relations without ever reaching ultimate results, but rather acknowledging the ongoing push

and pull of forces that connect the individual lives to collective and social practices.

“All of us are capable of being reasonable through being open-minded about welcoming information and through reflecting on arguments coming from different quarters, along with undertaking interactive deliberations and debates on how the underlying issues” (Sen,2009, p 43)

Because of this reflexive and dialog-oriented character, mediators work in a battle of interests of themselves, of museums - as institutions and their workplace - and interests of publics.

“There is a difficult matter of authority during guided visits. You don’t want to compromise your view as a mediator, and ethics, but at the same time you may not want to stand against the rules imposed by the museum, schools and teachers upon visitors and mediation content.”
(Anonymous)

As it is reported above, there is a contradiction between mediation being an empowering discursive tool while lacking autonomy to deeply develop critical discourses, build relationships of trust between participants, or

even address pressing topics of social importance that are considered taboos in society, thus ‘inappropriate’ in a museum visit. It is during their practice that mediators find out the limitations of their work.

“Once, two young visitors refused to stay next to me while visiting the exhibitions. I heard them complaining to their teacher that I was a nigger. I was alone with that group (there were no other mediators). I was afraid and couldn’t confront the students or approach the teacher to say anything, because he was agreeing with his students’ behavior.” (Anonymous)

Instead of establishing an open dialogue with and against the many issues that were encountered in, and sometimes derived from, art mediation, mediators have found difficulty in responding to these struggles when they arose during mediated experiences.

“Much will depend on the vigor of democratic politics in generating tolerant values, and there is no automatic guarantee of success by the mere existence of democratic institutions.”(Sen, 2009, p. 354)

Thus, the community of actors who perform mediation is, at the same time, a community of agents in the exhibition space and an assembly of passive individuals towards hegemonic power. This transit between mediating and being mediated opens up for the activities of absorbing content, reproducing norms, thinking critically and criticizing, which cover the work of affirmative and reproductive types of mediation discourses. However, it remains to be more thoroughly studied how to collectively incorporate critical discourses so that mediation gives rise to a creative community that acts in the spaces of museums, but is, at the same time, more autonomous:

“Democratic freedom can certainly be used to enhance social justice and a better and fairer politics. The process, however, is not automatic and requires activism on the part of politically engaged citizens.” (Sen, 2009, 351)

It is possible to affirm that he/she who gets involved with mediation agrees to, at least,

come together in that space and take part on what is proposed as mediation:

“Abandon their position as spectators: rather than being placed in front of a spectacle, they are surrounded by the performance, drawn into the circle of action that restores their collective energy.”
(Rancière, 2009, p.7)

The act of coming together and agreeing with this conduct signalizes a primary zone of participation, in which the parts involved have a place and time for sharing collective experiences but is not necessarily political in a clear and conscious way. Nonetheless, the directions taken from this primary zone of coming together might lead to emancipation and democracy within different kinds of mediation – affirmative, reproductive, deconstructive and transformative, among other that are not categorized in this study.

Despite the idea of an active community in museums being an attractive one, deconstructive and transformative projects have proved to be very difficult to achieve, mostly because they demand compromise, vulnerability and openness to change,

errors, experimentations and frustrations. Most people (and institutions) are afraid of getting involved with transformations because they would have to engage with conflicts, define clear political positions, maybe lose their status, their jobs, etc. History shows that those who embodied critical discourses and worked for radical causes were punished, and not many sectors of society are willing to enter this battle.

“Even though an openness to dialogue is encouraged in mediation, most people are not willing to participate, or they don’t care about what is happening in that moment. There has to be a constant effort to make mediation something meaningful.”
(Anonymous)

Rancière understands the process of community as dynamic critical relations and negotiations of power between the individual, the collective, and the social – a set up where publics, mediators and institutions, among other participants, can work together to give shape to museums. This idea of community is applied here to think mediation as social performance:

“I mean the community as a way of occupying a place and a time, as the body in action as opposed to a mere apparatus of laws; a set of perceptions, gestures and attitudes that precede and pre-form laws and political institutions.” (Rancière, 2009, p. 6)

Thinking about strategies for shifting from mere passive participation to active community of different parts is a frustrating task, because the status and structure of mediation as a labor is one that stops mediation from moving to more radical practices. Even though cultural institutions have opened up to mediations as deconstructive discourses, these remain limited to instigating critical thought and not critical action. A more transformative type of mediation, one in which critical actions were incorporated into the functioning of that institution, would enable publics to move from their positions as assisted people to stages of creative participation and actual decision-making in museums.

“I aim at showing people the love I have for art. When someone feels this love or reacts towards it, it is very memorable.”
(Anonymous)

In practice, mediation can push the limits

of authority in art exhibitions and the actors don't have to be necessarily punished, if only they know what is possible to do within their specific contexts. This kind of knowledge is not taught in school or mediation formation, but it can be learned by practice - testing and experimenting. Without acting, one can never know the limits of bureaucracies and conventions. But who would be interested in taking part in such endeavor?

“Most times, when a group of people visits a museum, they just want to have a good experience, be respected, and feel like they belong in that space. Especially if it's a group of unprivileged people, the contact with art is a moment of primary recognition. Then, perhaps, if they have the chance to return, other situations can be developed. But there lies the problem of continuity in mediation. We rarely see those people again.” (Anonymous)

After all, the most challenging and transformative forces of art mediation clash with the structure of museums. As permanent institutions, they have been built and constantly actualized by a mechanic of rules and social conventions set up to sustain their permanence and

authority over publics. Within these limitations, maybe a more just relation between institutions and publics could be developed if the latter were active in the making of cultural policies. In this case, mediative strategies offer opportunities for continuing public discussion and deepening of social justice.

At last, the reflections prompted by the talks with mediators are examples of the practical aspect of mediation as labor. Furthermore, the interviews were a process of mutual learning due to the contact of diverse backgrounds and the displacement resulted from the suspension of usual assumptions through contact, interaction and exchange of things that would generate some kind of open learning and expansion of the sets of knowledge and modes of sharing it. Then again, these possible expressions of emancipation are embedded in the museums' apparatuses, which "appears at the intersection of power relations and relations of knowledge" (Agamben, 2009)

8.

The state of mediation and its unfoldings – this grey area that interconnects empowering emancipatory moments with profitable institutional outcomes and so many other possible developments – is both enhanced and undermined by structural conditions of work, such as employment, formation, financial resources and work guidelines. Even though there has been increasing interest in mediation, there hasn't been an equally increasing investment in the field, thus mediators are expected to excel at what they do and accomplish institutional goals without a well structured support-system.

The daily working conditions of mediators are permeated by a lack of consistency that undermines mediation as work. According to research developed in Kunst Museum of Luzern, even though there has been an increasing awareness on the role of mediation, the structure of its work hasn't had substantial changes. Whereas

working policies should take into account conditions such as salaries, systematic and continuous formation, and dignified working environments, mediation “remains one of the more poorly paid and insecure fields of work in the cultural sphere.” (TfCM, p.168) Although institutions have been receiving more funding for educational initiatives, resources for mediation are very limited. Furthermore, the cross-disciplinarity and ambiguous frameworks of educational programs in museums have contributed to a disorientation about what mediation can be and how it can come into being, thus making it a confusing and frail activity. In the middle of the uncertainties that permeate their work, mediators find themselves responsible for trying to meet all of the demands coming from museums, visitors, and work colleagues, apart from their own expectations as professionals.

In addition to specialist knowledge and pedagogical skills, cultural mediators need to be able to innovate, to devise new approaches. They need stamina, tenacity

and aptitude since their aim is to inject new elements into existing structures. (Dürr, p.177)

Mediators are expected to contribute with leadership, pedagogical skills, critical thinking, among other qualities of excellence, but how would they embody these qualities if they are not supplied with proper work conditions and training? One of the justifications for this exploitative labor, which is very common in the field of arts, is that the outcome of a work shouldn't be only financial, but experiential. This sort of attitude from the part of decision makers, and the acceptance by those who submit to it, refrains the development of professional mediators, building up to marginalization of mediation as work, therefore causing dissatisfaction and socially excluded professionals. Needless to say, the proportion of those who actually remain as mediators and specialize in this specific field is rather small (numbers weren't found, which indicates a demand for thorough research on this particular topic).

Mediators are seen by the public, and to a

certain extent identify themselves, as: representatives of the museum, holders and controllers of information. Since most of these workers come from new middle-class background, which in the last decades has had more access to higher education, they have presented desire to mediate as a form of equality practice, in which they share their privilege of having knowledge.

“They see themselves, by virtue of their occupation, as socially competent, good team players and good networkers, as inventive in coping with limited resources, as curious and ready to learn new things.”
(Mörsche, 2012, p.80)

Furthermore, because art mediation might involve so many disciplines beyond the arts, they are expected to master all sorts of knowledges, regardless from their personal background; they should be ready to fulfill the supposed needs of given publics. The majority of mediators interviewed in this particular research, for example, were students still in their early stages of academic studies, hired as interns working from 3 to 6 hours a day, for very low salaries. These students came

from different areas of study, which might contribute positively to collaborative practices and knowledge exchange, but at the same time requires stronger coordination, so that their expertise is not misused, and could be effectively channeled into the work.

According to the German Museums Association in its handbook *Lifelong Learning in Museums*, institutions should “ensure that the diversity of staff matches the diversity of the audience the museum wishes to attract”. (Gibbs et al. 2007, p.17) Nonetheless, mediation formation, apart from not being specialized, is also often approached, even in the very same handbook afore-mentioned, as “informal learning” (Gibbs et al. 2007, p. 13), which contributes to a loss of specificity in the labor, accompanied by the underdevelopment of formation and structure disorganization in the field.

Mediation formation, or training as it is often referred, might include lectures, discussions,

brief contacts with the curatorial project, artworks, artists, exhibition design, exhibition production, meetings with curators, artists and other professionals. In most museums (at least in all that were visited for this study) mediators are introduced to the above-mentioned elements and to the pedagogical project specifically proposed by the curator of the exhibition in a short period of time. A variety of interpretive methods and artistic/educational research are added to sociocultural inclusion issues and accessibility of special public (blind, deaf, etc.)

After receiving training and formation, mediators are expected to work “permitting the creation of relationships among the participants (e.g. mediators, public), the vehicles of expression (e.g. art works) and societal structures (e.g. cultural institutions).” (Mörsch, 2012, p.37) Hence, here are some capacities often expected from mediators: 1) to be able to present information and answer questions from visitors 2) to construct meanings and connect them to livelihood of cultural and

social realities; 3) to prioritize research and the development of educational practices; 4) build conditions to exercise critical thinking, problem solving, collective and trans-disciplinarily work, creativity, innovation, leadership and autonomy.

As of this moment, not many institutions have started to develop long-term courses on mediation formation; associations (mostly based in Europe), have been working in benefit of professional development in the field. In Brazil, where the interviews took place, mediation has recently started to be researched as a more specific discipline within the arts, rather than just a branch of art education. However, there aren't any medium or long-term duration courses on mediation.

Now, if mediators were to be considered agents for the development of critical discourses and emancipation of publics, would their institutional formation be compatible with the work target of democratic transformation? And if

mediation were deprived of its peripheral character, would the process remain open to critical agencies?

“Mediation is changing from what was once an ill-defined, open field of experimentation into an increasingly disciplined sphere... Funding institutions are using mediation and the knowledge it produces to enhance their own claims to legitimacy and their own images.” (Time for Cultural Mediation, 169)

To think the formation of mediators beyond institutional frameworks, while acknowledging its inevitable institutionalization, requires attentiveness to the problematic intersections between the diverse interests interplayed in art mediation as a labor. One possible approach to the formation of mediators is to have them play an active role in the design of the afore-mentioned courses and associations. In other words, have mediators participate in the process of decision making of their own labor and its conditions of praxis. When mediation is conceived in terms of active participation and construction of knowledge for emancipation, this democratic movement might be catalyzed if the

work is developed by professionals who have been formed through effective participation and development of their formation from bottom-up instead of authoritarian tactics of formation, which go against democratic strategies.

Script

A THEORY OF JUSTICE

(SCRIPT)

FADE IN:

INTERIOR. MUSEUM CORRIDOR. WORKING
HOURS.

Tracking shot. Camera moves through a bright stairway entering a museum. White noise. Sound of air conditioning. Footsteps are heard in the distance. Nice wooden shoe heels. Even though there are noises, a quality of respectful silence prevails the environment. Large massive white walls at a medium distance fill in the visual scope of the place.

VOICE OVER (This shot lasts as long as this voice's speech): We did it every year, as long as I can recall. Since my very first year in school. And every year we had to do it again. It was called A day in the Museum, but it was reduced to just a couple of hours in the morning, actually. The school bus for special occasions was booked, museum sent us rules for the visit, and, sometimes, special snacks were provided by the school. It always created a lot of excitement. Bus driver and teacher were really angry because we made too much mess. And it never was as exciting as we thought it would be. Teacher complained a lot about everything. Student's attitude, the museum, the visit guides, snack. The following year, the same teacher would take us again to the museum. Why the hell did we go there again, if everyone complained about the visit? This is a strange school. But I guess it's normal for schools to visit museums.

EXTERIOR. OUTSIDE A SCHOOL BUS.

EARLY MORNING

Four students and a teacher standing outside the school bus. Through the window, the excited talk among other students inside the bus, they stand, sit, change places, laughter and shouting. The group outside talks.

PIGGY (an older student, already in its teen years, stocky, narrow eyes, strong jaws. His is the voice in the beginning): - Teacher.

TEACHER (impatient voice): - What is it now?

PIGGY: Why are we going to the museum again? We already know this one.

SMARTY (eagle nose, quick eyes): - Yeah, teacher, we're tired of going there. The place is cool, but...

MAY (sorrow voice and features of someone who wasn't well fed during childhood): - Why don't we get to go to other places like students from other grades do?

TEACHER (cautiously organizing things inside a bag, annoyed): - What do you suggest then, May? At least we've got free entrance in this place. Plus, art is interesting. Can you imagine our world without art?

MAY: - Yeah, but other students have been to the science center, the zoo. They told us we could have gone there too.

TEACHER (now speaking to the one student who was in silence until now): - Tell them, Pet.

PET (small, black skin, speaks while playing with a Swiss army knife, back leaning on the bus): - Today is a special day in the museum. We bring some surprise. Make a work of art by ourselves in the museum.

SMARTY: - No way, we can't do anything there! (gestures to his own throat indicating slit). You won't do anything. (Looks at the teacher).

PET: Museum is a place for expressing your own art.

TEACHER: That's right. We're going there to make *our* artwork.

MAY: Damn, teacher, you could've at least told us. I thought we were going just for visiting.

TEACHER: Stop complaining, May. I don't have to explain all my plans to you. Look. This is going to be an artwork. No one expects the visitors to make a work of art. But we will. That's why it is an exceptional work. So, no one can say that art is boring, and the museum was boring, just like last year. I can't force you to engage with art, but I can show you how art is done, right?

PIGGY (excited): - Yes!!!

INTERIOR. MUSEUM.

An exhibition room inside the museum. Dry walls divide the large room into smaller areas. A guided visit is taking place in the area closer to the door. Two large paintings are seen on a wall. Between them, a TV screen shows a video of an old man being interviewed. There is a short step between the wall and a group of people staring at it. Cell phones up and down, some people are taking pictures. A museum worker wearing a t-shirt that reads *mediator* is in front of the group, bouncing between them and the wall. Beyond visitor's backs and necks, the mediator is seen speaking.

SOUND: silence prevails. White noise, air conditioning and interviewee's speech on the monitor in low volume.

Mediator speaks in a low tone and pauses. People make small movements.

SOUND: white noise, air conditioning, interviewee and mediator.

Looking over to the group, the mediator asks a question. People observe. Two people on the back whisper some things to one another. Someone on the front speaks. Mediator responds and they engage on a short dialogue. Unheard.

CUT:

INTERIOR. MUSEUM CORRIDOR.

Meanwhile, the teacher, followed closely by Pet, Piggy, Smarty, May and another mediator lead the group of students moving towards the exhibition room seen before. They walk in silently and are noticed by the previous group, which is still in the same room. The new group gathers up around another mediator as they expect him to start speaking. The group is settling down to start listening. All of a sudden, the teacher moves and shoots a gun at the floor. Piggy does the same. They shoot the walls, ceiling and the floor. Confusion amongst students.

SOUND: gunshots, screaming.

TEACHER: Everybody! Hands on your neck.

PIGGY: Hands on your fucking neck!

A security guard standing near the door moves toward it but stops under new bullets fired. Everyone freezes after this.

SOMEONE CRIES: Don't shoot, please.

TEACHER: Everybody, hands on the neck, I said!

SOUND: air conditioning, interview on the monitor, water sprinkling from pipe that was shot, whimpers

TEACHER (shouting at the two mediators): You two, turn this fucking TV off.

They obey.

TEACHER (again talking to the mediators): Now take these painting off the wall and bring them next to me.

They move towards the wall and with certain difficulty start pulling the heavy paintings. They are attached to tight hooks. Cracking sounds are heard. Both paintings are removed and put on the floor. Finally, they are dragged closer to where everyone is grouped in the middle of the room.

CUT:

INTERIOR. SAME PLACE. POSSIBLY A FEW MINUTES LATER.

Now all the victims are laying face down on the floor.

SOUND: Now that the video with the interview is off, what remains is air conditioning, water sprinkling, the sound of people talking somewhere outside the room.

TEACHER: - Pet, go and find the manager or someone responsible for this place right now. If they refuse to come, you will shoot. Was I clear?

SOUND: A tone rings on the speakers, an internal advertisement about the museum's programme. It sounds savagely loud in that room.

CUT:

INTERIOR. SAME PLACE. A FEW MINUTES LATER.

Camera is closer to the group. A new man stands next to the paintings on the floor, he holds Pet's Swiss army knife in his hands. One of the mediators has a gun in his hands. They are both under fire aim and look sorrow.

SOUND: Water sprinkling. Air conditioning. A fart.

THE MAN WITH THE KNIFE: - Please, let's not do this.

PIGGY (pointing at a painting): - Tear it!

THE MAN WITH THE KNIFE: - But...

PIGGY (pointing at the painting): - Tear the fuck out of it! And you there, with the gun, shoot the other painting. I'm getting impatient.

Overwhelmed, they obey. The one with the knife clumsily tears the canvas with a few incisions. The one with the gun shoots at the other painting.

SOUND: Torn fabric, bang, whispers, dry echo of gunshot.

Once it is over, the teacher calmly looks at the mediator with the gun.

TEACHER – We will take this TV screen to the school. Now, I want you to shoot the security guard.

PIGGY (to the mediator): So?! You heard the teacher.

The guide with the gun approaches the security guard and shoots.

The security guard drops down to the floor.

PIGGY: - Now, you, with the knife. Cut this one's tongue off. (Points to the one with the gun.)

The man with the knife approaches, Piggy helps pulling the other one's tongue out, holding him steady while the one with the knife starts cutting it. Pain grunts. Exasperated movements. Choking sounds and screams. It takes apparently endless 20 seconds until the tongue is completely off. Meanwhile, the others observe. Some of them cry.

SMARTY (humming a melody): - Why you gotta be so cruel? Don't you know I'm human too?

TEACHER: Shut it, Smarty! Do not disturb. – Piggy....

PIGGY: Yes, teacher?

TEACHER: Pick the tongue up, we're taking that as well.

INTERIOR. CLASSROOM.

Students and teacher are grouped around a table. Camera travels closer. The tongue lies on the table.

FADE OUT.

The end.

Assessment #3

This research allowed me and the people involved in its interviews to exercise our own jurisdiction - learning and educating by ourselves - critically recognizing the extent of our power and institutional power in the various relations interplayed during mediated visits. Throughout the study, the moments that most approximated to the notion of emancipation and more justice happened when some kind of reflection or imagination was confronted with apparatuses pre-established paradigms. The exercise of reflecting upon, and testing, the economy of knowledge gave rise to recognitions in terms of what art mediation represents in this scenario, how it is done and where it can lead.

Firstly, since art mediation is mostly attached to educational projects, it seems relevant to develop more dialogs in terms of democratic education and the possibility of learning with

publics instead of educating publics. As Mörshe pointed out, the deconstructive and transformative discourses would probably be the ones to push education-oriented mediation to a critical level where mediators and mediated persons build their knowledge in a foot of more equality. In order for that to happen, not only art mediation needs more autonomy, but also more solid alliances with publics.

Secondly, as far as the mediators interviewed in this study attested, their contact with publics is usually fast and superficial, thus impeding them of constructing solid relations or specialized knowledge together. Also, participants don't question the possibility of different types of mediation (other than guided visits), so they settle for a faster, easier and more comfortable relation in which mediators give information and public receives it. Overall, mediators reported the problem of spending only short time with publics and the difficulties arisen from these brief encounters. The matter of time seems to be

relevant here along with the understanding of the spaces where art mediation happens and why they provide superficial contact with publics. It isn't only a matter of having more contact (time + space) within mediation, but also that this contact be different from the usual types of mediation in museums. It doesn't seem that simply spending more hours inside a museum would change the game of mediation into something more empowering and democratic. However, if mediation could be extended to outside the exhibition room and reach other places in society at other times that are not necessarily museum visit time, maybe that could bring about some critical situations to exercise democracy within art mediation. Thus, what other times and spaces could be occupied by art mediation? What kind of alliances could be created to bring participants together in this differentiated moments and places of contact? And finally, who would be willing to participate and how can they benefit from art mediation while giving their force to it?

These questions lead to another recurrent problem found in the interviews, which is the apparent lack of interest in engaging with art mediation as a transformative process. For innumerable reasons, both publics and mediators haven't been active or very responsive when it comes to engaging with critical thought and critical actions. This lack of interest signalizes how the whole spectrum of art is irrelevant for the majority of publics. It is also important to note how transformative mediative projects are unlikely to get funding or institutional support that is essential for its execution. Both issues are embedded in the structure of hegemonic discourses and practices that tend to maintain art and its disciplines, such as mediation, closely attached to institutional interests. Therefore, the marginal position of mediation in the field of arts might be a channel to make art more meaningful for publics while allowing them to take more parts in the construction of knowledge in art. Then again, if operating in the margins of museums enables

mediations to be dissident exercises in culture, would the specialization of mediation and mediators represent a step back in the process of empowerment through mediation? Would it make mediation a more rigid and controlled exercise or is it possible to specialize and direct art mediation towards specific public goals, through which people might become more attracted to and interested in mediation, art, museums, and of course, the possibility of exercising their power in the intersections of this set up?

Furthermore, as it happens with mediation and basically any format of institutionalized knowledge production, this study is also inserted in a hegemonic system of construction of knowledge and power. The attempts to be in touch with hegemonic power through different channels and positions resulted in a complex, contradictory situation of expanded emancipation combined with cultural, historical, and social dependency. Although the exercises of investigation, criticism,

democratization tend to reconstitute some of the power that is controlled by governance and its apparatuses, they become hegemonic themselves, because of the impossibility to threaten hegemonic control, instead, setting motion of government machinery.

Operational problems in the research involved, but were not limited to, my skills as researcher, the methods chosen to investigate the topic and its application. The fact that art, and art mediation, involve multiple disciplines and modes of operation, can challenge the standardized division of knowledges, disciplinary specializations and labor. Due to this multi-disciplinary nature, a continuation of this research will implement specialized evaluation formats in order to look deeper into the developments of specific areas that are affected by art mediation: social, economic, cultural, and others.

Besides the demand for new evaluation tools to perform this research, if art mediation is to be reasonably assessed as a democratic tool, there

is a need to study its developments more in terms of “improvements and declines” (Sen, 2009, p.94) than in terms of perfect outcomes that would reach everyone’s needs. With its multiplicity of discourses that can coexist in every guided visit to a museum, mediation assumes, altogether, the form of a practice of consolidation of paradigms, imitation of social norms in the micro-scale of museums, improvisation of social roles, rearrangement of ideas and desires, and also resistance, by addressing issues related to hegemonic models of domination.

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